

Psalt Conference - Saturday Morning Devotional
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I have been asked to spend a few minutes this morning on Heb. 12:15, the verse which you probably know which says that we are not to let a root of bitterness grow up in our hearts. But let me read verse 14 and 15.

“Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”

The call of God in our lives is pretty clear, to make every effort to live in peace with everyone, to live free of sin, and to be holy. Then comes the warning that no bitter root grows up in us – in our hearts – which will only cause trouble and defile us. And it’s worth noting that that we are to, “see to it” that this not happen. Other translations say to watch out, or be careful. It is possible that bitterness really can settle into our hearts.

Now I think I understand why I was asked to reflect on this with you. For it is possible in our current situation for us to not live in peace with others, to not be holy, and to allow ourselves to become bitter. I have heard comments like these over the last couple of years, and while I don’t sense bitterness in them, I can see how they could be the seeds of bitterness. Someone has said, “They’ve taken away my church,” “they” have. I’ve heard, “Where did my church go?”, or “This is bringing the world into the church”. Another comment was, “They are misrepresenting the word of God”, which I think all of us recognize as the main issue which is at the heart of this debate. How about this one,” A vocal minority has brought an initiative which is the last thing we need as a struggling denomination or in our local churches”. Well I guess we will see if it is a vocal minority or not. But out of these types of thoughts, I can see the potential for bitterness to emerge. One definition of bitterness is this, “having a harsh, disagreeable, or acrid taste”, a definition which applies to the physical realm but can so easily apply to a heart as well. In the personal, relational realm the definition is that which is, “characterized by intense antagonism, or hostility.”

Now having a heart filled with bitterness is so far from the heart which produces peace and holiness. My question for we who are gathered here today is this,

“how is your heart, and how is my heart?” And how will my heart be if I have to give up my pension? How will my heart be if I have to ask the people of my congregation to pay for another mortgage after having almost paid off the mortgage we took ten years ago to build our new building? How will my heart be toward, “those people” in the face of change and loss?

Prov. 4:23 says, “Guard your heart for it is the well spring of life.” Another translation says, “Guard your heart above all else for it determines the course of your life.” We are told in this verse, and in Heb. 12, to protect our hearts, to be vigilant about them, to be careful with them.

In the end the issue becomes how will we engage this debate? While we together advocate for a biblical position which calls for people to live in holiness, will we be holy? While we call for people to live a godly life, will we be godly?

Let me make this last quick point. The Heb. 12 passage goes on to talk about Esau who gave away his birthright and wanted to later inherit the blessing but could not, even through his tears. My friends, the blessing of God comes with godliness and holiness, from a heart free from bitterness and which is full of love.

Ps. 139:23-24 says, “Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” I want to invite all of us here today to take five minutes in silence before the Lord, and to ask him to test our hearts, and to see if there is any offensive way in us. Let’s just be quiet in his presence and listen for the Lord to speak, that our hearts might be pure and right before him. If you discover any bitterness, confess it, so that we can move beyond anything which might keep us from having the heart that He so longs for us to know.